



# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

April 2016

**S**anibona, molweni, greetings. I am ready to take another journey with you into the wonderful world of blogging. Yes, a month has passed, although it feels as if it was only the other day that we communicated through this column. The bad news is that time flies; the good news is that you're the pilot. While on the subject of pilots, I am moving ahead quite nicely with flying lessons in Pietermaritzburg and hope to begin writing mandatory examinations in the next few months. My objective is to obtain a private pilot licence and that has not changed. Once in the air solo, I know I will have the exhilarating experience of pursuing an interest that is worlds apart from navigating Umgeni Water, especially during this stressful period of water shortages.

In the past year, at the onset of a full-blown drought, I have had to make some instant and often unpopular decisions in order to ensure that the estimated 6 million consumers who are served with potable water that is produced by Umgeni Water have some water. It was a question of doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Take, for example, Umgeni Water's implementation of 4 emergency schemes to augment the limited water resources that were available for the supply areas of Middle South Coast, Hazelmere, Ixopo and Maphumulo systems. Approximately R65 million was spent on these schemes – money that was not budgeted for during the year in question. But it was done for the right reason: to prevent total collapse of water services provision that would have been caused by dams reaching dead storage.

Then in the months ahead and in the midst of a deteriorating dry spell, I took a decision to cut back on potable water production below benchmark at some of Umgeni Water's treatment plants because the affected Water Services Authorities were being lackadaisical about applying restrictions. This was an unpopular decision, but again the right thing to do.

## How much more should we do?

**C**an you imagine my surprise – and confusion– when I was invited recently to attend a meeting at Pineside, called by the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and facilitated by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), to discuss what else Umgeni Water can do to further mitigate the effects of the drought. It seems this meeting was convened at the request of the MEC of CoGTA, who was not happy with a presentation by Umgeni Water relating to the drought. According to the emissaries of the MEC, information was required on what emergency interventions have been implemented by Umgeni Water, what else can be done, at what cost and by when? It must be noted that Umgeni Water has shared all information about its drought interventions. It was expected that Umgeni Water's responses to these questions would be converted into an action plan that the MEC intends presenting to the Minister of Water and Sanitation, showing how Umgeni Water and Mhlathuze Water would be assisting CoGTA with water provision in KwaZulu-Natal during the winter months.

Let's pause here for a moment and take stock. Umgeni Water has already spent R 65 million on 4 emergency schemes, plus R2,5 million on emergency water



# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

April 2016

provision to Applebosch and add to that the deployment of resources in districts outside its traditional operational area to fix and replace ageing infrastructure. This is the information I shared with the

meeting, along with a firm statement that Umgeni Water can only work outside its designated operational area if there is a specific assignment and mandate. There also has to be a clear brief on what needs to be investigated and how and who will fund the work that is to be undertaken. This will then be presented to the Board of Umgeni Water for approval. Umgeni Water cannot take on an unfunded mandate, I said. I am not a fan of actions plans because they generally make promises that they do not or cannot deliver.

The startling omission in this discussion was Water Services Authorities (WSAs). They are at the coal face of water provision to consumers and have also been affected by water shortages. I made it abundantly clear that WSAs need to clarify what they have done to mitigate the impact of the drought and point out where they need help. Bypassing them and engaging Water Boards directly for interventions will achieve little or nothing. They are vital components in the partnership for delivery. It is my firm view that one of the ways of enhancing performance of WSAs is to remove the bulk function from them and delegate it to Water Boards in order to allow WSAs to concentrate on reticulation. The need for change in implementation, operation and maintenance of municipal bulk function was debated with the Director-General of DWS and she agreed it should become the responsibility of Water Boards.

The meeting ended with an agreement that the WSAs would be engaged and that between CoGTA and DWS a plan would be created with input from Umgeni Water. The first stop in this exercise should have been WSAs and later Umgeni Water and Mhlathuze Water. In this way a great deal of time would have been saved in developing a plan for the MEC. It is also important that



One of Umgeni Water Emergency Schemes – Hazelmere Dam



# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

April 2016

if Umgeni Water’s interventions are required, CoGTA needs to be clear about what, where, for how long and sources of funding. In uMkhanyakude, for example, where Umgeni Water has done some work on commercial basis, the mandate was clear. If it hadn’t been, staff of Umgeni Water would have been all over the vast expanse of uMkhanyakude, trying to isolate problems without knowing what they are and where they reside. It would have been akin to manoeuvring a vehicle in the dark with its headlights switched off. The staff who were operating in uMkhanyakude were under pressure to deliver more than the available funds could provide. This led the project team to over spend by a substantial amount and it was growing, making it necessary for Umgeni Water executive intervention.

## Sharing information with stakeholders in a transparent way

It is always rewarding to engage with stakeholders from private and public sector institutions that want to know more about Umgeni Water and share information about themselves. A dialogue with the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry, KZN Planning Commission, South African National Civic Organisation and South African Human Rights Commission proved to be constructive and highly interactive as we began to learn about one another and identify common interests. This was Umgeni Water’s first engagement with the Human Rights Commission, in line with its stakeholder management strategy. Proceedings began with presentations on an





# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

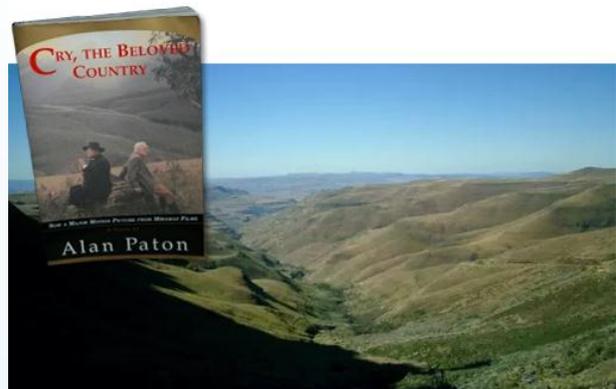
April 2016

organisational profile of Umgeni Water, progress with the formation of one (1) regional utility for KZN, prevailing drought situation and interventions implemented by Umgeni Water to augment water resources, major bulk potable water projects under implementation or to be implemented and Umgeni Water’s asset management strategy, programme and spend.

There were several questions relating to the role, functions, mandate of Umgeni Water; planned dis-establishment of Umgeni Water and Mhlathuze Water and formation of 1 entity; management of drought interventions and management and maintenance of Umgeni Water’s infrastructure. Guests then spoke about the organisations they represent, and the Human Rights Commission attracted many questions that were intended to enhance understanding of its role. Questions related to its mandate, the time it takes to complete an investigation, the number of complaints that are made annually with the Human Rights Commission, the sanction that is issued when a respondent is found to have breached the rights of a complainant and the number and nature of complaints that relate to water and sanitation. It emerged from responses that there have been many complaints that related to lack of access to water, water supply interruptions and the cost of water provided by Water Services Authorities. Indeed, water remains an essential need that will continue to occupy prime position on the South African and global agendas.

## Dry, the Beloved Country

It is pleasant to journey through the rolling hills described in apartheid-era Liberal politician and



author Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country* to get to the town of Ixopo, where the offices of Harry Gwala District Municipality are situated. There to meet a delegation from Umgeni Water were the Mayor of Harry Gwala DM, Speaker of Council and senior officials. It was an engagement that had been in the planning for several months and long overdue.

The Mayor set the scene by outlining the water resource availability challenges that are being faced in drought-hit Kokstad and Ixopo, and the urgent need to identify new sources of water. It is as a result of lack of big regional schemes, the municipality has become dependent on small dams that are not sustainable. The municipality is keen on forging a partnership with Umgeni Water for the implementation of augmentation projects, among them a pipeline from Bulwer Dam to Ixopo and regional schemes it has identified. According to the Mayor, Bulwer Dam is currently under “construction”. The Mayor also made the following points:

- A number of operational challenges are being faced as a result of lack of co-operation



# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

April 2016

between technical teams of Umgeni Water and Harry Gwala DM

- Whether a bulk pipeline from Umzimkulu River would be able to carry sufficient yield to augment water resource availability in Ixopo
- There is a need for Umgeni Water and Harry Gwala DM to be proactive in the planning of a pipeline from Bulwer Dam to Ixopo
- Umgeni Water should make some proposals on how to resolve supply interruptions in some streets of Ixopo
- Harry Gwala DM requires a crisis plan to prevent Ixopo running out of water in the winter months

In response to the question about a pipeline from Umzimkulu River, representatives of Umgeni Water pointed out that this is possible, but not a cheap option at an estimated cost of R304 million. It will not be mitigation against the drought. What are required are long-term sustainable solutions and, to this end, Umgeni Water is examining the possibility of a regional scheme for Umzimkulu.

In response, I made a strong case for Umgeni Water to operate and manage more schemes in Harry Gwala District while, at the same time, pointing out that Umgeni Water has to be prudent about how it spends as it has begun cost saving, including a reduction of R2, 5 billion in the Capex budget.

This discussion was followed by a presentation on the impact of the drought on Ixopo and 4 emergency interventions that have been implemented. Later, a presentation was made on encroachments onto Umgeni Water’s servitudes within Harry Gwala District.

Dwellings have been built on pipelines, at great risk to its occupants, but representatives of Harry Gwala DM maintained that they have dealt with this situation. A problem has also arisen at the water treatment plant, where residents of informal settlements attempted to take water by force and also tampered with electricity through illegal connections.

## Addicted to speaking and texting

Now that we’re done with the business of the month, let’s deal with communication of a different kind that has made information sharing instantaneous in a global village that begins to shrink every time one says “hi” or “goodbye”.

Hooked on your cell phone? I am. Does that make me a junkie? It does, but a junkie of the non-drug, non-alcohol and non-gambling variety – that’s if researchers’ findings are to be believed. Let’s look at what researchers have found, but before we do that pick up your cell phone, switch on the “silent” mode and place it far away, preferably about 3 metres from where you are seated.

In the past year at least 5 studies were conducted in many parts of the world, including one in South Africa,





# From The Desk Of The CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyril Gamede

April 2016

and all pronounced a common finding: the majority of cell phone users are addicted to their devices. The addiction has become so widespread that it has been formally documented as a syndrome, called **NOMOPHOBIA**, or no-mobile-phone-phobia. **NOMOPHOBIA** is described as a psychological syndrome in which a person is afraid of being out of cell phone contact.

In South Korea, the home of big-name brand appliances and cell phones, the government has initiated plans for the establishment of rehabilitation centres that will assist youngsters to break the habit of cell phone dependency. For the duration of treatment these addicts will be forced to live without their mobiles and computers.

In South Africa the Bureau for Market Research at the University of South Africa conducted a study among 5 000 teenagers. It found that the majority experienced withdrawal symptoms – similar to one weaning his or herself off drugs or cigarettes – when cell phones were taken away from them. In the same study it was found that 75% of learners, when getting up in the morning, the first thing they do is check their cell phones, which illustrates a high dependency. Some admitted to have stolen money to obtain airtime, while others said they become nervous when they lose their phones. The latter has been described by researchers as Phone Separation Anxiety (PSA).

It gets worse. A study that was conducted by a cell phone repair company found that 60% of people surveyed looked at their phones more often than they looked at their partners!

Here’s a little exercise for you. Try to work out how long you can stay without your cell phone. The world record for the shortest period is 2 minutes and the longest is 7 hours and 8 minutes.

## Ulale Ngokuthula, Prince

There have been many tributes and final goodbyes to the Wizard of Pop, Prince Rogers Nelson. I want to add my admiration as well. I grew up on the music of Prince and continued to savour it in later years, enjoying every lyric and sound from the works of this legend who made Purple Rain a global smash hit. He inspired many generations after him through his display of skill as an instrumentalist and actor and showed that even “in the land of the free” – where prejudice still prevails – anything is possible if you have talent and the will to succeed.



There’s a lesson to be learnt from the life and times of Prince and that is: let nothing get in the way of your goals.

Salani Kahle

**Cyril Vuyani Gamede**  
Chief Executive